

NOVEMBER 23, 1981

Holiday festival draws big crowd

By Mark Peterson
Of The State Journal

The doors had barely opened at the first International Holiday Festival at the Madison Civic Center Sunday when it was clear the event merited an "annual" tag and an encore in 1982.

About 20,000 people showed up to mill through the Civic Center, sampling snacks, crafts, and entertainment originating from throughout the world, according to Melissa Ferrari, director of the Friends of the Civic Center, the planners of the festival.

A thousand people came as the festival began at noon and "right away we (the committee) said we've got to do this again next year," she said.

The success of the festival left its planners overwhelmed as well as overjoyed.

"I'm so excited to see so many people here," said Mrs. Velma Hamilton, a member of the hospitality committee. "We would have been happy with half this many."

A sweet shop on the upper level of the center was out of food by 5 p.m. Workers providing a Korean snack were busy making and selling one every few seconds throughout the day. The man-doo, ground beef and assorted vegetables wrapped in a wonton skin, kept a dozen people busy satisfying the crowd's appetite.

At one group of four tables, 3,000 pieces of finger foods were gone before 4 p.m. Foods from Brazil, Mexico, India, France, China, Sweden, Japan and other countries were sold for an average price of a quarter.

About 10,000 people got to nicker and dime their appetites and their curiosity to satisfaction.

To the entertainment there seemed no end. Five gathering places were used for the full eight hours to provide entertainment from a vast array of cultures.

Wafting into the aisles of the Civic Center was Irish music from Sue

Richards and Rebecca Lee, Latin American folk music from Sotavento, English Madrigals from Mixed Nuts and the singing, dancing and storytelling of dozens of other groups.

The more intrepid people listened to the anecdotes and folktales of assorted cultures as they tried their hands — and their feet, and their energy — at learning various folk dances.

Displays of crafts included weaving, needlework, ceramics, dolls, ornaments and clown faces.

Hundreds of children sporting painted clown faces were mixed in with the cultural dress of performing groups and the variety of faces involved in a gathering of thousands.

The largest gathering of child clowns could be seen clowning around with Santa Claus, who sat on the floor rolling about, joking and talking with his admirers.

The coming of Christmas and other ethnic holiday themes were scattered throughout the day. A sing-along which filled the acoustic depths of the center followed a Slavic choir.

An "old fashioned" 15-foot Scotch pine Christmas tree served as a focal point for the group singing. Ornaments and the popcorn and cranberry garland were donated by many groups in the community.

According to its organizers, the International Holiday Festival fulfilled hopes that people would be drawn together to enjoy the ethnic traditions of themselves and others.

Performers joined the crowds in expressing to the organizers a desire to see the event become annual. A number of groups have already asked to be included as performers and exhibitors next year.

The festival is also sponsored by the Madison Civic Center Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts. It is the first major project for the Friends of the Civic Center.